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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, has been chosen to head a group of moderate Republicans in the House of Representatives who support a less conservative agenda than is advocated by some party leaders.

A coalition of 35 Republican members of the House elected Kirk and Rep. Charles Bass, of New Hampshire, to co-chair the Mainstream Republican Tuesday Group in the 109th Congress.

"I think the spirit of the Republican Party should be anti-corruption, pro-defense, pro-personal responsibility and pro-education and my leadership of this group is part of the effort (to ensure) that the party is grounded in those principals," said Kirk of Highland Park.

Kirk portrayed himself as a moderate Republican during his successful bid for re-election in the 10th District against Democrat Lee Goodman.

"I think the main effort is to make sure Congress reflects the priorities of voters," Kirk said. "When you looked at the polls for the 2004 election, people who described themselves as moderate outnumbered people who described themselves as liberal or conservative."

Kirk said the Mainstream Republican group will push for stronger environmental legislation, promote a strong national defense including support of key allies like Israel, and support medical liability and malpractice reform. Kirk said the group also supports "pro-science legislation" and ways to increase stem cell research, a controversial topic opposed by many conservative Republicans.

"We are strong advocates for stem cell research," he said.

Kirk said his group will work closely with the Republican National Committee and the Republican Main Street Partnership on developing a strategy to address the needs and concerns of suburban voters. He said results from the 2004 election show suburban voters far outnumber urban or rural voters.

"The suburbs are becoming the No. 1 voting constituency in America," said Kirk. "Our group wants to focus more of its attention on the needs of families who live in suburbs: good schools, good roads, and state of the art health care."

Kirk's leadership of the moderate group threatens to put him at odds with some party leaders. When House Republicans voted overwhelmingly to change House ethics rules to protect House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's leadership post in the event DeLay, R-Texas, is indicted for violating fundraising laws in Texas, Kirk and other members of the moderate Republican group voted against the rule changes.

"We had some changes to the House Rules which were sponsored by allies of Tom DeLay and I voted against them and I think most members of the moderate (Republican) group did as well. I think we should maintain the highest ethical standards and we should not change the rules. I think if a congressman is indicted they should step down from any leadership of Congress."